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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000399

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PINR PINS ASEC KDEM ML
SUBJECT: NORTHERN MALIAN ARABS TAKE DEMOCRACY HOSTAGE FOR
THE WEEKEND

REF: A. 08 BAMAKO 00371
 ¶B. BAMAKO 00383
 ¶C. BAMAKO 00280

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: An armed group of Malian Berabiche Arabs kidnapped nine primarily Tuareg elected officials outside Timbuktu early on June 5 to disrupt the selection of representatives to Timbuktu's Regional Assembly which was scheduled to have occurred on June 6. Allegedly led by Lamine Tahar, the Berabiche group reportedly threatened to kill the hostages - who included one ethnic Arab - if an Arab was not tapped as the next president of Timbuktu's Regional Assembly. Three of the nine hostages were released later in the day on June 5. The remaining six were not released until the evening of June 8, at a well 160 KM north of Timbuktu as Malian security forces were closing in. Meanwhile, Telemssi Arabs led by Minister of Culture Mohamed el Moctar and Malian army Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou reportedly installed fellow Telemssi Arab officials in government posts in Tarkint, north of Gao, without consulting fellow elected Tuareg and Kounta Arab leaders. These events reflect a recurring phenomenon of rivalry and jockeying for position among Berabiche and Telemssi leaders from northern Mali. End Summary.

Berabiche Kidnap Tuaregs in Timbuktu

2.(C) Before dawn on June 5 a group of Arab Berabiche leaders from Timbuktu took eight elected Tuareg leaders and one elected Arab official hostage in the town of Bourem Inaly, about 20 KM outside of Timbuktu. Reports on June 5 indicated that the nine men were lodged in the same residence in advance of a June 6 vote to decide the composition of Timbuktu's Regional Assembly. A group of armed Berabiche, allegedly led by Lamine Tahar, roused the Tuareg leaders from their sleep and led them, bound and blindfolded, to vehicles which took them into the desert. The Berabiche ordered a black Tamachek who was with the Tuareg group to return to Timbuktu on foot to sound the alarm. Three of the nine captured Tuaregs were released later in the day on June 5. The remaining five Tuaregs and one Arab were not freed until the night of June 7 when their kidnappers abandoned them at a well, 160 KM north of Timbuktu, as Malian security forces closed in.

3.(C) Local Timbuktu officials elected during Mali's April 26 municipal elections were scheduled to vote on the composition of Timbuktu's Regional Assembly on June 6. The kidnapping was designed to disrupt this vote. One of the kidnap victims was outgoing Regional Assembly president, Mohamed ag Sindibla. In a show of bravado, his Berabiche captors allegedly threatened to kill the remaining six hostages if the new president of the Timbuktu Regional Assembly was not a member of northern Mali's ethnic Berabiche community.

4.(C) The incident triggered a general alert among Malian security forces in Timbuktu and a one day delay of JCET training activities planned for June 6 with U.S. forces in Timbuktu. That training has since resumed and will be completed near the end of the month. Lamine Tahar, the alleged leader of the hostage-takers, is a prominent Berabiche businessman in Timbuktu and president of the Union of Malian Arab Communities (UCAM), which is primarily a Berabiche association (Ref. A). Some Tuaregs also linked Malian State Security officer and Berabiche militia leader Col. Lamana ould Bbou to the kidnapping. Lamana's militia is reportedly stationed around the town of Ber, which is about 25 KM east of Bourem Inaly.

5.(C) All of the kidnapping victims also belonged to Mali's majority Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) political party - which introduces a potential political angle aside from an ethnic one. ADEMA claimed the largest number of seats in the communal elections both in Timbuktu and in Mali.

At the time of the hostage taking, the ADEMA officials were preparing for the election of Timbuktu's District Council, scheduled for June 6. The ADEMA officials filed individual legal complaints with judicial authorities in response to the kidnapping, although the assassination of Colonel Lamana on June 10 has diverted the attention of the authorities (Ref. B).

6.(SBU) Malian authorities immediately reacted to the hostage taking, assembling and tasking security force units to find and free the hostages. At the same time, community elements in Timbuktu rose in indignant protest against the hostage

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taking, demonstrating in front of the offices of Timbuktu's governor, Colonel Mamadou Mangara. On Monday, June 8, the freed hostages were taken to the Governor's Office in Timbuktu for a short ceremony. Afterwards, they were taken to a hospital for a medical checkup. The hostages indicate that they were not physically mistreated by the hostage takers, and that they were given plenty to eat. The election for the District Council, meanwhile, has been rescheduled for Saturday, June 20.

Telemssi Arabs Pull a Fast One in Tarkint

7.(C) As the hostage crisis was playing out in Timbuktu, Malian officials in Bamako apparently dispatched several Telemssi Arab leaders - Minister of Culture Mohamed el Moctar, Malian army Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou, an unknown Arab businessman close to President Toure, and probably former National Assembly Deputy Mohamed ould Mataly - to Tarkint north of Gao. The team was ostensibly to negotiate a resolution to a separate conflict between Idnane Tuaregs, Kounta Arabs, and Telemssi Arabs. This conflict has been simmering since Mali's April 26 election day when Telemssi Arab militias descended on Tarkint to tip the electoral scales in favor of a candidate list composed entirely of ethnic Telemssi Arabs, including AQIM intermediary and Tarkint mayor Baba ould Chouekh (Ref. C).

8.(C) Tuareg contacts from Tarkint, however, have reported that instead of negotiating the delegation assembled newly elected Telemssi Arab councilors and proceeded with the selection of the District Council without bothering to inform elected Tuaregs or Kounta Arabs. The Telemssi Arabs constituted a majority of the elected officials, thus the exclusion of the Tuaregs and Kounta Arabs did not likely affect the outcome of the District Council election. Local Tuaregs, however, interpreted the move as another act of bad faith on the part of Malian Arabs. The same Tuaregs had previously recommended postponing the selection of the District Council pending the outcome of the court proceeding in Mopti challenging the April 26 results.

Summary: More Arab Muscle

9.(C) The incidents in Timbuktu and Tarkint represent examples of muscle flexing both among Arab groups, and by those groups toward their Tuareg neighbors, depending on the locale. Moreover, they are evidence of a greater preoccupation with political control than northern Mali's Arab groups have displayed in the past. The incidents illustrate the Malian government's difficulty in imposing order in distant northern regions where local groups do not hesitate to use guns and fast 4x4s to try to impose their position, whatever Malian law.

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